

A CALL TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Transforming The Caregiving Crisis
into A "Missional Aging" Movement



A CALL TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Transforming The Caregiving Crisis into A "Missional Aging" Movement.

A White Paper for Christian Leaders and Faith Communities

About this Paper

This paper stands on the shoulders of two foundational works that have shaped our thinking and given urgency to our message:

- **The Lausanne Movement Report on Global Aging Population,**
See <https://www.caregiverscommunity.ca/lausanne-2/>
- **The Ontario Caregiver Organization's *Preparing to Care* Report,**
See <https://www.caregiverscommunity.ca/prepare-to-care/>

From these roots, the content was further developed through the work of the Caregivers Community¹ and enriched with current research and contemporary AI analysis and insight.

While the data presented here are largely drawn from the Canadian context, we believe the trends they reveal are neither uniquely Canadian nor culturally isolated. The aging of populations, the quiet exhaustion of family caregivers, and the gap between what health systems can provide and what human dignity requires — these are shared realities across the world. And the opportunity they present to faith-based leaders is equally universal.

Wherever you lead — whether a congregation of forty or four thousand, in Canada or beyond its borders — this paper is written for you.

¹ For tools and resources visit <https://www.caregiverscommunity.ca/>
Or contact [Help@ CaregiversCommunity.ca](mailto:Help@CaregiversCommunity.ca)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A quiet revolution is reshaping the fabric of Canadian — and global — society. By 2068, nearly one in three Canadians will be over the age of 65. Today, 13.4 million Canadians already provide some form of unpaid care, and the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence warns that a 'perfect storm is brewing.' Demand for care is rising sharply while the pool of available caregivers is shrinking and care needs are growing more complex.

The Church stands at a unique crossroads. This is not merely a healthcare crisis unfolding at arm's length from the pews — it is already inside our congregations. Spouses are quietly exhausted caring for ailing partners. Adult children are navigating the demands of aging parents while raising their own families. Seniors are caring for other seniors, often in isolation and without adequate support.

This white paper makes the case that caregiving is a profound spiritual calling, not simply a social obligation. The Church is uniquely positioned — with its relational networks, moral authority, and volunteer base — to become a first-responder community for family caregivers. Moreover, the growing cohort of active, purposeful seniors within our congregations represents an untapped missional force: seniors helping seniors, fulfilling the biblical mandate of intergenerational care and community.

This paper calls Christian leaders, pastors, and ministry organizations to move from awareness to action — to see caregiving not as a burden to manage but as a mission to embrace.

THE AGING DEMOGRAPHIC AND ITS IMPACT

A Tidal Shift in Population

The numbers are striking. Canada passed a historic demographic threshold just a few years ago: for the first time, there were more Canadians aged 65 and older than children aged 14 and under. This is not a temporary fluctuation — it is a permanent realignment of the population, driven by longer life expectancies, lower birth rates, and the mass aging of the baby boom generation.

18.5%	Share of Canadians aged 65+ in 2021 — projected to reach up to 29.8% by 2068 (Statistics Canada)
33%	13.4M Canadians who currently provide some form of unpaid care to adults or children (Statistics Canada, 2024)
1 in 4	Canadians is a caregiver today. Nearly 20% of those caregivers are themselves over 65
\$128B	Projected annual value of unpaid caregiver contribution to Canada's healthcare system by 2035
95%+	Of individuals receiving long-term home care rely on at least one unpaid caregiver

Behind these numbers are human beings — mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, and friends — who are carrying an enormous weight, often in silence. The average unpaid caregiver provides **8 to 26 hours of care per week**, depending on the condition of the person they are supporting. Many are doing this while holding down full-time employment and raising children of their own.

The Shrinking Caregiver Pool

The particular challenge of our moment is this: not only are more people needing care, but fewer people are available to give it. Smaller family sizes, geographic mobility, delayed fertility, and the competing demands on mid-life Canadians mean that the caregiving burden is concentrated on an ever-narrowing group. The Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence describes the situation plainly: demand for care is growing, caregivers are aging, and the number of available caregivers is going down.

This is not a distant policy problem. **This is a pastoral emergency.** The question for the Church is not whether its members will encounter caregiving — they already have. The question is whether the Church will show up meaningfully for them when they do.

Seniors Caring for Seniors

One of the least-discussed realities of modern caregiving is how many seniors are themselves primary caregivers. Statistics Canada reports that nearly 1.5 million Canadians aged 65 and older were caregivers in 2018, and the most recent data suggests that nearly 1 in 5 caregivers of older adults is now over 65. Most commonly, they are caring for a spouse or partner.

This creates a dual vulnerability: a person managing their own health challenges, providing care for someone equally or more frail, often without adequate support networks or recognition. The loneliness and isolation of this group is acute — and it is largely invisible to the communities around them.

THE CAREGIVING CRISIS: EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL, AND SOCIETAL DIMENSIONS

The Hidden Toll on Caregivers

To be a family caregiver is to inhabit a world of paradox. It is often deeply meaningful — and it is often quietly devastating. Research consistently shows that unpaid caregivers carry extraordinary emotional and physical burdens that most of the people around them cannot see.

87%	Of caregivers in Canada report experiencing loneliness (CCCE, 2024)
73%	Report moderate to high levels of anxiety
69%	Report a decline in their own mental health
2 in 3	Distressed caregivers say it is difficult to continue providing care
5.7B	Hours of unpaid care provided every year in Canada — without any compensation

These are not abstract statistics. They describe the woman in the third pew whose husband has dementia. They describe the retired man who drives his wife to chemotherapy three times a week and tells no one how frightened he is. They describe the daughter who lives across the country, managing her mother's medical appointments by phone, weeping in the parking lot after every call.

“There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, are currently caregivers, will be caregivers, or will need caregivers.”

— Richard Gentzler Jr., aging ministry expert (paraphrasing former First Lady Rosalynn Carter)

The Spiritual Dimension of Caregiver Suffering

What makes the caregiver's burden uniquely difficult from a faith perspective is that it is rarely acknowledged as suffering. We celebrate the courage of the person receiving care. We organize prayer chains and meal trains for the sick. But the caregiver — who is quietly sacrificing sleep, finances, health, career, and sometimes hope — is often invisible.

Many caregivers experience profound spiritual dislocation: a creeping sense of abandonment by God, a loss of their own identity, anger that they feel they cannot express, and grief for the relationship they once had with the person they are now caring for. For those caring for spouses with dementia, this grief is particularly acute — mourning someone who is still present but fundamentally changed.

This is not a failure of faith. **It is a cry for pastoral presence.** And it is a cry the Church is uniquely equipped to answer — if it chooses to hear it.

The Societal Cost of Inaction

It would be a mistake to view this as a problem the health system can solve on its own. Unpaid caregivers already contribute an estimated \$24 to \$31 billion in free labour to Canada's healthcare system annually. By 2035, that figure is projected to reach \$128 billion. This is not a safety net — it is the system itself. Unpaid caregivers provide as much as 75% of the total healthcare costs for seniors. Without unpaid caregivers, health services in Canada would collapse.

Faith communities that step into this space are not merely doing good works — they are shouldering a responsibility that society cannot carry alone. The Church has always been at its most powerful when it stands in the gap between what the state can provide and what human dignity requires.

THE CHURCH'S MISSIONAL OPPORTUNITY: SENIORS AS CAREGIVERS

Rethinking the Role of Seniors in the Congregation

For too long, the Church has related to its senior members primarily as people to be served — recipients of pastoral care, targets of outreach programs, the occupants of the back rows at Sunday service. This is a profound waste of human capital, relational wisdom, and spiritual maturity.

The active seniors in our congregations represent an extraordinary missional resource. Many have retired from professional life but retain enormous reserves of time, empathy, experience, and faith. They have navigated illness, grief, family complexity, and the particular spiritual terrain of growing older. They know, from the inside, what it means to feel forgotten.

“These churches may have only 100 people, but every single person there knows each other. When someone has surgery, they bring meals, and they know if someone needs help going to the doctor. It is a sense of community that naturally lends more support to caregivers.”

— Caregiver advocate, as cited in *Christianity Today*, 2024

This insight points to something the Church has always known but sometimes forgotten: proximity and relationship are the irreducible foundation of care. Seniors who have walked through caregiving themselves are uniquely positioned to come alongside others who are just beginning that journey.

Seniors Helping Seniors: A Model for Missional Community

The concept of 'seniors helping seniors' is both profoundly practical and deeply theological. It recognizes that wisdom is earned, that empathy is forged in shared experience, and that purpose — the deep human need to matter and to contribute — does not end at retirement.

A retired nurse who spent thirty years in home care can offer a frightened spouse more in one afternoon visit than a professional counsellor can in six sessions. A widow who cared for her husband through Parkinson's disease can sit with a man newly navigating the same diagnosis and speak truth with authority that no textbook can replicate. This is the irreplaceable ministry of presence, and it belongs in the Church.

When the Church mobilizes its seniors as caregivers and companions to other caregivers, it accomplishes multiple things at once: it addresses real need in the community, it provides the senior caregiver with purpose and belonging, it strengthens the bonds of intergenerational community, and it embodies the gospel in tangible, daily life.

Why the Church Has a Unique Advantage

Research confirms what many pastors already sense intuitively: caregivers often resist formal support systems but have a built-in level of trust with their church community. They will not call a government helpline. They may not join a support group. But they will open the door when someone from their congregation knocks.

This is the Church's structural advantage — relationships built over years, a shared vocabulary of faith, and a community gathered weekly in the same space. No government program, no matter how well funded, can replicate this. It must come from within, and it must be deliberately cultivated.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CAREGIVING

Made to Bear One Another's Burdens

The call to care is not peripheral to Christian faith — it is central to it. The Apostle Paul's instruction in Galatians 6:2 to 'carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ' is not a suggestion for particularly compassionate church members. It is a description of what the community of believers is — a body that bears weight together.

The caregiving crisis is, at its heart, a burden problem. People are carrying more than they were designed to carry alone. The answer, in biblical terms, is not primarily professional — it is communal. We are meant to hold one another up.

Honour, Dignity, and the Weight of Years

Throughout Scripture, old age is treated not as a problem to be managed but as a stage of life to be honoured. Leviticus 19:32 commands the people of God to 'rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God.' Proverbs 16:31 calls grey hair 'a crown of splendor.' The fifth commandment — to honour father and mother — has always carried implicit obligations that extend through the entire lifespan.

For the Church to honour its aging members is not merely to provide for them in their frailty. It is to recognize their ongoing dignity, wisdom, and capacity for contribution. **A theology of ageing that reduces seniors to objects of care rather than subjects of purpose is not only incomplete — it is unfaithful to the fullness of what Scripture says.**

The Widow, the Neighbour, and the Good Samaritan

The biblical imagination is full of caregiving. James 1:27 defines true religion as caring for orphans and widows in their distress. Jesus in Matthew 25 identifies himself with the sick, the vulnerable, and those who are forgotten — and tells us that what we do for them, we do for him.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, arguably the most famous story of caregiving in all of Scripture, dismantles every excuse for passing by. The Samaritan did not assess whether the wounded man deserved his help. He did not check whether it was convenient. He crossed cultural boundaries, gave generously of his own resources, and promised to return. He created what we might today call a care plan.

The Church is called to be, in every generation, a community of Good Samaritans. And caregivers — exhausted, lonely, unseen — are lying on the side of our road.

Intergenerational Discipleship Through Caregiving

Titus 2 gives us a vision of the Church in which older men and women are explicitly called to invest in younger generations — to teach, model, and transmit the wisdom of a life lived in faith. Caregiving, modelled by mature believers and experienced alongside younger ones, is one of the most profound forms of intergenerational discipleship available to the Church.

When a congregation's seniors are mobilized not only as recipients of ministry but as its practitioners, something transformative happens: the Church becomes what it was always meant to be — not a service centre, but a community that bears one another's burdens across every season of life.

PRACTICAL PATHWAYS AND MODELS FOR CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT

Where to Begin: Assessment and Awareness

The first step for any congregation is to understand the caregiving reality within its own walls and community. Most churches have no idea how many of their members are currently providing informal care — and most caregivers will not identify themselves as such. They think of themselves simply as spouses, children, or friends who are doing what love requires.

A simple congregational survey, a series of conversations led by the pastor or care team, or the intentional creation of space for caregiving stories to be told can surface this hidden need and signal to caregivers that the Church sees them.

Practical Models for Congregational Action

Across North America and beyond, faith communities of every size are finding creative, sustainable ways to support caregivers. The following models offer a starting point:

- **Caregiver Support Circles:** Small groups of 6–10 people, ideally facilitated by someone with lived caregiving experience, meeting regularly for mutual support, prayer, and shared wisdom. These are not counselling sessions — they are communities of belonging.
- **Senior Visitor Programs:** Trained seniors who make regular visits to fellow seniors who are caregiving at home, particularly for those who are caring for spouses. The gift of a listening ear, a cup of tea, and the presence of someone who understands cannot be overstated.
- **Practical Mercy Teams:** Organized teams who provide tangible relief — meals, transportation to medical appointments, yard work, grocery shopping — allowing caregivers a brief but vital respite from their responsibilities.
- **Pulpit and Teaching Integration:** Preaching that names caregiving as ministry, praying publicly for caregivers, and incorporating caregiver stories into the life of the congregation normalizes the conversation and reduces the isolation that caregivers feel.
- **Prepare to Care Workshops:** Equipping church members — particularly those in the 40–60 age range — to understand what caregiving involves before they are thrust into it without warning. Anticipatory preparation dramatically reduces stress and improves caregiver health outcomes.
- **Pastoral Care Protocols:** Training pastors and lay leaders to specifically ask about caregiving during home visits and pastoral conversations, and to know how to connect congregants with professional resources when needed.

Partnering with the Broader Community

No congregation needs to build this from scratch. Caregiving organizations, denominational resources, and community health networks all offer tools, curricula, and training that can be adopted and adapted. Partnerships with local healthcare providers, home care agencies, and government services can extend a congregation's reach while keeping the relational and spiritual core within the faith community.

The most effective models are those that position the Church neither as a replacement for professional services nor as merely a referral conduit, but as the warm, relational centre around which all other supports orbit.

CALL TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND MINISTRIES

To every pastor, elder, deacon, women's ministry leader, men's fellowship coordinator, and lay leader reading these pages: the wave is already here. It is not cresting on the horizon — it is washing through your congregation right now. The question is not whether the caregiving crisis will touch your church. It is whether your church will choose to respond.

We issue the following specific challenge:

Preach it. Name caregiving from the pulpit as a form of Christian discipleship. Let caregivers know they are seen, their work is sacred, and their exhaustion is real.

Survey your congregation. Find out who is currently caring for someone. You will be surprised how many hands would go up — if only someone asked.

Mobilize your seniors. Identify the purposeful, capable seniors in your congregation and in your community who have life experience, availability, and heart. Train them. Empower them. Send them.

Create a point of contact. Designate a 'Caregiving Coordinator' — a staff member or committed volunteer — to whom caregivers can turn. This single act communicates that the church takes this seriously.

Equip before the crisis hits. Offer 'Prepare to Care' sessions for your congregation annually. Most people who will become caregivers in the next decade have no idea what is coming. Preparation is a form of compassion.

Partner intentionally. Connect with Christian caregiving organizations and networks that can provide curriculum, training, and community beyond your congregation's walls.

“Caring for the caregiver is not a niche ministry for the few — it is the ministry of the whole Church to the whole world.”

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The aging of our society is not a problem the Church can solve. But it is a problem in which the Church can be redemptively present. Family caregivers — the spouses, children, siblings, and friends who are quietly holding the world together for those they love — need community, need presence, and need to know that their sacrifice is seen and honoured by God.

The Church that responds to this moment will not simply be meeting a social need. It will be living out the gospel in one of the most urgent and tangible ways available to it in the twenty-first century. It will be bearing the burdens of the weary. It will be honouring the aged. It will be turning seniors from recipients of ministry into agents of it. And it will be embodying, before a watching world, the love of Christ.

The wave is here. The question is not what will happen — but who will show up.

Recommended Next Steps for Your Congregation

- **Visit caregiverscommunity.ca for free prepare to Care resources**
- Gather your leadership team to prayerfully assess your congregation's current awareness of and response to family caregiving
- Identify 2–3 seniors in your congregation with caregiving experience and invite them into a conversation about serving as peer supporters
- Plan a 'Caregiving Sunday' — a Sunday where the needs of caregivers are named, prayed for, and responded to with concrete commitment
- Connect with your denomination's social ministry arm or a local Christian caregiving organization to explore training and partnership opportunities

Additional Sources and Data References

Statistics Canada (2024) · Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence (CCCE, 2024) · Angus Reid Institute Caregiving Survey (2019) · Statistics Canada General Social Survey on Caregiving and Care Receiving (2018, 2022) · Christianity Today, 'The Caregiving Boom Needs Spiritual Support' (2024) · National Institute on Ageing (2024) · Canadian Seniors Council Dialogue on Caregivers (2025)